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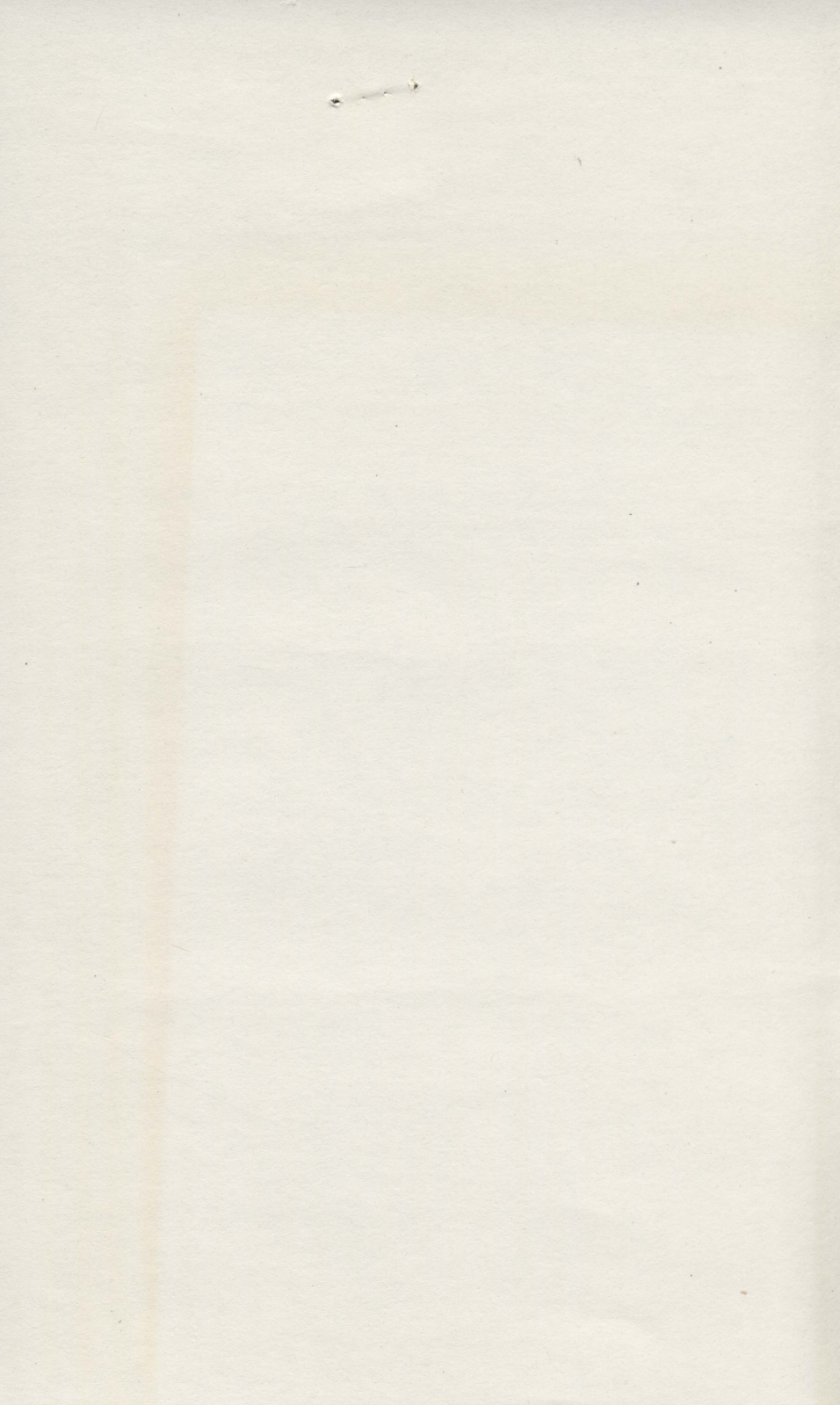
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To my Children,

MY LIFE

by Elias Vlessing Bzn.



PREFACE

I have written this history of my life for my children. They have heard fragments of it, and some of them even have visited the locations where this history has played itself out. Yet because all this happened in a society so different from the USA, in times so different from the present and almost unique in their contents of tragedy, I have taken the trouble of putting it down on paper. Although in this country there is a prevalent attitude among new immigrants and their families to try forgetting about the past, especially if this was less than pleasant, yet we should realize that we are the products of that same past and we cannot even start trying to understand ourselves if we have insufficient knowledge of our families and the circumstances in which they lived. There certainly is a profound difference between life in a small provincial town in the Netherlands where I grew up, or in a small village on a Dutch isle where my father grew up in a family of ten children, with only one other Jewish family in that village, and present day Suburbia USA with some ten percent Jewish population!

Unfortunately the contents of this history has been determined to a major degree by the limits of my memory, which are constricting as time goes on, and realizing this early on, I started to write it as soon as my other activities permitted.

I hope it will leave you with a little better knowledge and understanding of

Your Dad

THE EARLY YEARS

I was born in the city of Alkmaar, in the province of North-Holland, the Netherlands, on April 23, 1927. I think it was at the same address, Lamoraal Street 7, where we lived until I was about 8 years old, at which time we moved to what would remain our address, Westerweg 82, until we were expelled from the city with the remainder of the Jewish population, on March 5, 1942. My father, Barend Vlessing, was a solo-businessman who dealt in jute bags, which at that time was a current commodity. He was born and raised on the island of Texel, the first and largest of a chain of islands, the Wadden Islands, in front of the Dutch and German coast. My mother was born and raised in the city of Alkmaar, on December 7, 1899. My father's birth date was May 17, 1888. My father's family had been living on "the Island" since the beginning of the 19th century, where a few families by that name lived since then, until after WW2, when the last Vlessings left there and ultimately came to the USA. Even today many people on the island still remember the name Vlessing as some of you may sometime want to find out for yourselves!

Alkmaar at that time was already an important commercial center for the agricultural area West-Friesland to the north of it, with a few weekly markets in cattle, agricultural products and consumer's needs. It counted then some 30,000 inhabitants, at my last visit this already had risen to 90,000, including the innovation of some "houses of ill repute", never present "in my time"! It had excellent schools, none of the vices of big cities, in our spare time we played games and later on sports, especially soccer on which I spent many happy hours.

My father came from a family of "businessmen". According to his stories to which we as children listened with utter fascination for many happy hours, he grew up in a family with 10 children in a big long house at the Waalderstraat (I think no. 5), still called the Vlessings' Huis, at the village of Den Burgh, Texel. My grandfather engaged in several different types of business. I should mention that during the second half of the 19th century, the early years of the industrial revolution, economic conditions in Holland were such that

there was much dire poverty and many people had to work very hard to eke out a very meager living. So my grandfather, Opa Eli, as we affectionately called him (and incidentally, I am very proud to have been the first grandson named after him, which earned me the silver napkin ring which he used and which in turn I have been always using), had a business in rags (used in the manufacture of good quality paper), old metals (used in the manufacture of new metals), dry goods, (which he at first sold going on foot from house to house with a pack on his back and later on, when he became "better off", with cart and mule), lottery tickets etc. From early age the four boys in the family had to help out and to get up at 5 am sorting rags and all other kinds of work, until school time and then again after school hours. After all, there were 12 mouths to feed!

A brother of Opa Eli, Philip, also lived on the island in the same village, and I understand that at time they were the only two Jewish families living on the island. Uncle Philip was married more than once and one of his wives was a concert pianist. They had a son, Samuel, who became a well known musician in the seaport city of Ymuiden, which we visited in 1990 and I then showed you the square, Sam Vlessing Square, which was named after him. He also was a composer of music for marching bands and his two children were also musicians, his daughter Henrietta a pianist and his son Philip (you guessed it!) a cellist...As simple genealogical considerations will show, any musical abilities present (or absent) in our family (this in the restricted sense of the six of us) of course are completely unrelated to this branch that married into our family. For details I may refer you to our family tree, of which all of you should have a copy.

My paternal grandmother, Heintje van Messel, hailed from the city of Harlingen in Friesland. She was greatly loved and admired by our family as she had raised a large family (including one retarded daughter) in very difficult circumstances. She lived in Alkmaar the last 20 or so years of her life, cared for by her daughter Berendina, who was a nurse. We visited her regularly and her blond hair and blue eyes were inherited by my sister Aaltje, though not her inimitable Frisian accent which still rings in my ears! Her husband, Opa Eli, had prede-

ceased her for many years at the relatively young age of 57, rather suddenly, and, I suspect, from heart disease.

My mother was born and raised in Alkmaar. Her maiden name was Judith van der Kop. She had three brothers, one of whom was feeble-minded, and two sisters. Her father also dealt in rags and old metals, but was much better off than my paternal grandfather. I think he hailed from the village of De Ryp, not far to the south of Alkmaar. My grandmother's name was Aaltje van Creveld, this was a well-known Jewish family from Amsterdam, they among others included the publisher of a well known Jewish periodical, as well as prof. Simon van Creveld, my professor of pediatrics at the University of Amsterdam who was internationally renowned.

Needless to say, all my four grandparents were Jewish, although mixed marriages did occur in Holland at that time, assimilation was well on its way, aided by the benign attitude of the Dutch towards the Jews. Among all my paternal and maternal relatives there was one mixed marriage.

I should add that, as the Vlessing family tree shows, the Vlessings had been living on the island since the early 19th century. My knowledge about my mother's family in general is much more restricted, due to the absence of such a profound and eager source of information as my father was about his.

Besides my parents I had a sister Aaltje, a typical Dutch name and of course equivalent to the English Alice, who was named after our maternal grandmother, but who looked much more like our paternal grandmother, as mentioned above. She was a beautiful girl with light blond curly hair and blue eyes and had a very sweet disposition, she was the eldest of us and 2 years my senior. And then there was my brother Max, the youngest and three years my junior, named after our maternal grandfather. You have seen that in Holland it was quite customary to name children after relatives, especially after grandparents but mostly only after those grandparent's demise.

My early years were carefree as a child's should be. We played with neighborhood children and certainly did not experience any anti-semitism. I went to kindergarten in the neighborhood and later to elementary school more in center city, but all within walking distance. These were all public schools, of superb quality, private schools were almost unheard of, and only for the snobbish, rich, and unnecessary from the point of view of quality of education. Therefore private schools did not come into consideration for my parents because of cost, lack of necessity. Our Jewish education was provided by the "heder". This was given on Wednesday afternoon for 2 hours and on Sunday morning for 3 hours, starting at the age of six and at least until bar-mitzwah for boys (and afterwards if interested) and for girls until similar age, if I correctly remember, there was no bat-mitzwah for girls. The teacher was our rabbi de Wolff for whom it was only one of his many obligations. I obtained an excellent background in Jewish history, learned enough Hebrew to understand the prayers, and then Jewish customs etc. My parents were not observant, both not coming from religious homes, but both of them apparently must have gone to some type of "heder" as they knew more than just the rudiments of Judaism. It is not clear to me to this day how my father learned about this as there were too few Jewish students on the island to maintain a Jewish school. My father went to "shul" a few times a year, he was a member of the synagogue council. We did not have a kosher household, but ate matzoth on Pesach. For the seder our parents sent us to observant relatives or to the rabbi, especially during our early teen years. My father usually stayed home on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Otherwise he was mostly traveling, by train usually, and he mostly returned home for supper. He drove a car only occasionally and apparently did not feel comfortable doing so. That had something to do with his rather volatile temperament and I remember the rather curious situation where he had to obtain his driver's license with some difficulty from a man who also happened to be our landlord! Sometimes he took me along on his business trips during vacation time in the car to visit farmers and the commodity exchange. Thus I visited the areas that had been reclaimed from the sea only several years ago and were now covered by large prosperous farms, managed by selected capable farmers, many with

academic degrees in agriculture. As a solo-business man he worked at least six days a week, and spent the evenings doing his correspondence himself on a typewriter. My mother, who had finished a high school especially attuned for those who went into business, assisted my father with his bookkeeping, besides we had an accountant. Thus at our house there was a business atmosphere and I heard many business discussions between my parents. This was an experience which came me in very good stead when I opened my medical practice which, if you like it or not, is a business. Music was important at our home. I was about eight years old when my dad started me on the violin. My first teacher was an acquaintance, who thoroughly ruined my technique. He also was a member of the Dutch Nazi party, but that did not seem to bother my parents. At that time things in Holland were still rather relaxed. In the beginning my Dad helped me with my violin studies, apparently he had played the violin himself at one time. This was the more remarkable as he was at least moderately hard of hearing from at least his late twenties onwards. My second music teacher was excellent. Under his guidance I started to play duets early with a viola player who also happened to be our kosher bread delivery man. At a rather young age I started to play at occasions such as weddings. My parents did not go out much, my father as solo-businessman was too tied up, and baby sitters in those days had yet to be invented. My Mother once in a while took us to the movies when we were somewhat older. As we lived relatively close to the seashore we often went to the beach in summer, weather permitting, on Sundays. One summer we rented a house in the village of Bergen, even closer to the shore. We had a sizable tent which we set up on the beach and left there in storage. We spent our summer vacations mostly around the house, my sister was sent to a vacation home a number of times where she spent time with other children her age. I spent much time playing soccer on a big open field between the Jewish cemetery and the prison which I pointed out to some of you during our last visit. One summer we made a bicycle trip to Friesland and spent a day sailing on the Frisian lakes so famous for sailing. That memory had obvious implications for the future as you may understand. Trips abroad were out of the question for us as a family, but one summer in the late thirties my parents made a trip to the

World Fair in Paris, well remembered by me because of its rarity. The summer of 1938 we spent in the old city of Scheveningen (this is where my cousin Jos Vos used to live) and I remember this because at that time the present Dutch queen was born. I spent many a vacation at Jos's house, even before he moved to the sea shore at Scheveningen. His mother was my Dad's youngest sister and we always were good friends. And one time we spent several days on the island of Texel with its beautiful scenery, its birds and last but not least, the cradle of our family.

I went to kindergarten in our neighborhood and to elementary school, the Tesselschade School in town. During the last two years of elementary school I took French on a voluntary basis, for which my parents had to pay, otherwise, as a public school, it was free. I was quite a good student and therefore my parents decided to send me to one of the different types of high schools that emphasized mathematics and science, to leave open the possibility of an academic career. As my father was not that young any more, as he married rather late due to the fact that he became the breadwinner of my grandmother's household after the untimely death of my grandfather at the age of 57, the plans for me were that, under normal circumstances I most probably would join him in his business in order to provide for the family.

Family relations on my father's side of the family were fair. Brothers and sisters did see each other, although sometimes not that often depending on where they lived. Unfortunately relations between my father and my mother's family were strained, and although my maternal grandmother and two maternal uncles lived in our town, I do not remember them seeing each other. In the late thirties some reconciliation took place, but apparently that did not last. My brother Max told me that on the infamous day of March 5, 1942, when the entire Jewish population of Alkmaar had to leave town to be resettled in Amsterdam, our family and my maternal grandmother had our meal in the same room but did not speak to each other! My mother's brothers Salomon and Hartogh both lived in Alkmaar, they were partners in a business in rags and old metals, which they inherited from

their father. Both had no children. Hartogh lived across the road from us at the Westerweg, he had severe stuttering problem. His wife Dora was a musician, she had quite a good voice and also played the piano. His brother Salomon lived only a few blocks from us, in later years, he was a little "strange". On my father's side of the family, my grandmother Heintje van Messel, as mentioned, lived in Alkmaar. We spent many happy hours in her presence. We went to see her quite often. She passed away in the late thirties and I remember very well going to her funeral. She was buried near her beloved husband at the Jewish cemetery at Huisduinen, near Den Helder, near the sea strait that separates the mainland from the island Texel, where she had spent so many difficult, but I am sure happy years with her large family.

During her later years, when she suffered from renal disease, she was lovingly taken care of by her daughter Berendina, "Tante Be" as we called her, who was an RN, and got married only later in life. She had blond curly hair and blue eyes and had a very sweet and unassuming personality. She finally married a most typical commercial salesman, David Cohen, and moved to Rotterdam. Unfortunately she became a breast cancer patient, and went through much suffering. My father always went to see her when visiting Rotterdam on business. Her husband always came to see us when in town, and then he never hesitated to ask my mother for those good cigars we had in the house last time, or for anything else we might have in the house. In addition my father's eldest sister, Rosa, lived in town. She married an accountant, Isaac Prins, and had two sons, Eli, who some of you may remember visiting us in Levittown with his wife, Ida, the pianist, and Aaron who was an attorney. My uncle Isaac was a man of small stature with a big moustache. I still see him walking fast with small steps at the Verdrongen Oord, one of the many canals in town and where my maternal grandmother used to live, careful to stay on the bluestone sidewalk, but having to walk around the partitions on the sidewalk while doing so. He and my father apparently did not get along very well. My aunt Rosa was a very fine woman of very dignified bearing. She was well read and moved in the "higher" circles in town. Her son Eli was then single and lived at home. I remember

hearing at home that he had aspirations to be an actor, but had not been accepted at the Actor's Academy in Amsterdam. He was very well versed in Dutch literature. Besides, he and his brother were one of the few Zionists in town, and we sometimes met at his place when I became a member of the Zionist Youth Federation. Both he and his brother remained single. During the last days of the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, Eli managed to escape to England by jumping on a fishing boat at the port city of Ymuiden, not far from Alkmaar. That saved his life, all other members of his immediate family perished in the Holocaust. After arriving in England Eli became a lecturer in Dutch history and culture, and married Ida, a pianist. They visited us in Levittown several years ago. Eli passed away last year Ida had predeceased him by a few years.

Also in Alkmaar lived my father's youngest brother, Elize. He had a business in ropes and twine. His wife "Aunt Zus" was a gentile, and because of this mixed marriage my uncle was not subject to most of the anti-Jewish laws. He unfortunately contracted coronary heart disease while still in his forties and passed away in his fifties. His three children are Marjanne who became a nurse and who came to visit us, with her husband Huib in 1995 as some of you may remember. And then Eli, retired press man, who visited the States about two years ago and then must have met some of you. The reason he and I have the same first name is of course due to the fact that we both are named after our paternal grandfather. And then the youngest daughter Berendina whom I have not seen for many years.

Outside of Alkmaar lived my father's youngest sister Johanna ("Tante Jo"), married to Henry Vos, who first ran a dry goods store in the small city of Coevorden in the eastern part of Holland. They later moved to the seaside resort of Scheveningen. They had one son, Jos, who became a lawyer and later moved to Long Island N.Y. and whom all of you have met. Jos and I became very good friends and I stayed many a summer vacation with him, enjoying the beach. Fortunately the whole family survived the German occupation, in hiding. My father's oldest brother Sam, lived in The Hague, married to a German, Hannah Schott. He was a legendary figure. It was told about

him that he (a business man) had become very rich during World War 1, by selling to the Germans (then at war), but that afterwards he had lost most of his riches. At one time my father took his son Max into his business. The parents perished in the Holocaust, their children survived and Max ended up in Israel where I visited him several years ago.

Another sister of my father, Eva, lived in Amsterdam. She was married to Siegfried Zeckendorf, who unfortunately was very deaf. "Tante Eva" also was a kind of living legend in that her stories and sometimes her behavior bordered on the hysterical (this in the vernacular rather than in the medical sense!).

Another brother of my father, Abraham, lived in Amsterdam. He was also a business man. He had a very pleasant personality and was very popular. Unfortunately he died in his forties, also from coronary heart disease. I lost contact with his widow and daughter many years ago. My father had a sister Henriette who was mentally retarded and died probably in her twenties, and my mother had a brother, Meir, who also was mentally ill, and was taken care of in the Belgian village of Geel, which still is widely known for the treatment of mentally ill patients as members of laymen families who take them in.

During the late thirties I became a member of the youth branch of the Zionist organization. At that time Zionism was not very popular among Dutch Jews, it was most popular among intellectuals. It so happened that among the Dutch army that was quartered in Alkmaar (the Dutch army had been mobilized in the wake of the outbreak of WW2 in September, 1939), there were a number of leaders of the Zionist youth organization from Amsterdam, who founded a new branch in Alkmaar. My parents allowed us to join, which in retrospect is somewhat unexpected as my father was anti-Zionist, like most Dutch Jews. We had not a few discussions on the subject especially during our time in hiding when I started to think, and it still amazes me, that so few Jews had learned their lesson from history, even after they themselves had become victims! Zionists at that time were mostly to be found among the intellectuals, in Alkmaar the only

ones I can think of were my math teacher in high school, my cousin Eli Prins and his brother who was a lawyer. It was refreshing for me to learn, during the meetings of the Zionist youth organization, about Jewish subjects in a context quite different from our "heder" in a much more modern and refreshing way! We learned modern Jewish history, sang Jewish songs and saw a new goal to live for as Jews, which to me became ever more relevant as time went on.

As mentioned before, in early September 1939 World War Two broke out as Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Remembering that the Netherlands had remained neutral during WW One, we hoped this would happen again, especially the Dutch Jews! Although the fact that Germany already had invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia by that time was not very encouraging! A number of Jewish families saw the handwriting on the wall and emigrated to the USA or Great Britain, but that was not easy for those who were tied down by a local business, for instance, like my father.

However, on May 10, 1940 I was awakened in the early morning by the noise of airplanes. A few miles from our house was a military airport and those planes were German planes which started to drop bombs on that base. There were only a few of them and they did not engage in shooting or strafing. The Dutch planes were not in sight! On that early morning the Germans invaded Holland, and in addition France and Belgium. The war lasted only five days. There were no other hostilities around our area. Certain central areas of the country were inundated by the Dutch as a defensive measure, but to not much avail. We had to take in an elderly couple with their physician son and daughter-in-law who had been evacuated from those areas, for a few weeks. Needless to say, during those few war days and afterwards, there was much anxiety among the Jewish population. There were a number of Jews who committed suicide, some fled the country acutely to England (like my cousin Eli Prins), or to Belgium, France, Spain and Portugal and Switzerland. Of course, the former countries were occupied by the Germans at the same time. After the Dutch government surrendered and no anti-Jewish measures were forthcoming at least for the time being, these anxiety feelings sub-

sided somewhat, but, that respite was to be only temporary. During the war days the Dutch royal house and the most prominent Dutch government officials fled to England, which was met with mixed feelings by those staying behind. They formed a new government-in-exile in London, which later on directed such activities as underground work, military and otherwise, espionage and probably also help to Jews although I do not know details about the latter activity.

The German Occupation Years

After the first shock of the German occupation had subsided with some effects as described above, at least for me things remained fairly normal for the first year or so. I went to school as before, true, not in our own school building, but that had been the case already since before the occupation, since the building had been requisitioned by the government to house the army. So we were lodged in private houses, which was very inconvenient for the teachers. I should mention, though it did not concern me directly, that in early 1941 all Jews were obliged to register as such. Almost all of them did, and this was by far the greatest mistake they made for now the Nazis knew exactly who was a Jew and it became very difficult to escape the soon to follow anti-Jewish laws. All Jews should remember that they never again should register as such especially in circumstances where this can be used against them!

From early 1941 these "Nuremberg laws", so named after the German city where they were first promulgated, started to come off in crescendo fashion. Jewish professionals could only see Jewish clients, Jewish businesses had a gentile manager nominated, or sometimes were expropriated. In addition, later on my father was not allowed to travel, which made it almost impossible for him to conduct his business. For me a great blow fell when in September 1942 I was not allowed to return to my public high school. At first one of my class mates came to our house for lunch and brought me homework. This was not very effective, but soon a Jewish high school with only Jewish teachers and students was established in Haarlem, about half an hour south of Alkmaar by train and I started this school in late fall

1941. This was an excellent school. For my lunch hour I went to a very fine Jewish family, who had taken in our German refugee girl (whom we had taken in after the German programs of 1938) after she left our house. One experience at that school had a profound influence on me. At the time of Chanukah there was a cultural program at school, at which the teacher in classic languages, Dr. Mark Rooselaar, playing the cello, gave a recital with our French teacher playing the piano. They played the Beethoven variations on Handel's well known theme from Judas Maccabeus and the magnificent singing sound of the cello made an unforgettable impression on me that had obvious implications for my musical future. This is the type of experience that starts careers, except that in my case it took another 35 years before I could follow up on it! At that time I still played the violin. I was "adopted" by an insurance agent by the name of De Vliet who played the double bass. One of his sons played the piano and I played duets with him at his home many times, sometimes joined by father on the double bass. The father started a small symphony orchestra and I joined the violin section. Unfortunately I had to leave it soon because of the Nuremberg laws.

March 5, 1942 started the beginning of the end. On that day we had to leave our beloved home town on a day's notice. We managed to bring some of our furniture and other belongings to friends, which was forbidden, but had to leave behind everything else. And so we trudged through the snow, every one carrying a suitcase, from our house to the railway station, we were not allowed to use public transportation. I walked on wooden shoes because of infected sores on my feet. At the railway station we joined our fellow-Jews on the platform, including our rabbi and his family. Seeing us off were some well-meaning gentiles, such as the wife of the town mayor, as well as her neighbor, the wife of a well known dentist. And also a number of not-so-well-meaning policemen, to one of whom we had to give our house key when we left the house. Before we boarded the train our rabbi, who usually kept a rather low profile, raised his voice and told us that on this the punishment of God could not stay away. This scene as well as what preceded is still indelibly engraved in my memory and I invite the reader to compare it with the description in the book-

let "The Jews of Alkmaar".

After our arrival in Amsterdam we were assigned to live in an apartment with a middle aged couple. We had a fair amount of room. From that time my father could hardly carry on his business. I again went to a different school, again with only Jewish students and teachers, the Jewish Lyceum at the Stadstimmertuinen (try to pronounce that one correctly!). This school was a gem, where not only the brightest of the Jewish high school teachers were concentrated, but also those of the Jewish students. For instance, after the war our teacher in art history became professor of modern history at the Municipal University of Amsterdam and the author of the authoritative text on the history of the Jews in Holland during the occupation, called *The Destruction of the Dutch Jews* by Jacob Presser, for those of you who are interested. During that time we also were forced to wear an orange star with the word "Jew" on it. Failure to wear it was severely punished. When this measure was promulgated, the director of our school went from class to class and gave a little speech in which he emphasized that this badge should be seen not as a sign of disgrace, but as a sign of honor. This certainly was one of my most impressive memories of this period.

Another hobby of this period in my life was the study of nature. I joined an organization called the NJN (Dutch Youth League for the study of Nature). Most weekends we went on trips to the many lakes, swamps, beaches and woods around Alkmaar, mostly on bicycle, and looked for birds, plants etc. armed with books to determine the different species, learning much in the process and in the meantime enjoying nature. In summer there also were camps. It was amazing how much some of these youngsters knew about their subject. I think this activity greatly helped many of us to develop the more valuable interests in life. It certainly helped me to overcome the misery of those years. Even during the few months of our forced evacuation to Amsterdam I managed to escape from the city a number of times to the swampy areas to the North of the city to look for unusual plants, because that was my main interest.

An important issue in those years was the food situation. Soon after the onset of the German occupation (or possibly even before), certain food items, such as bread, meat, sugar, butter, were rationed. Although earlier on the rations were fair, as the war progressed they became smaller as a result of the Germans stealing our food supplies, so that during the last year of the occupation, when the German army was in retreat everywhere, there was outright famine in Holland. As my father had many customers among farmers, he always saw to adequate supplies of food for our family, at least so long as he was able to get around. Of course, this way of supplying food was illegal. A humorous note (at least as related now) is that one day my father was sitting in the train with a live chicken in his brief case. The poor animal found its surroundings quite confining and started to cackle, to the amusement of the fellow-travellers, but to my father's embarrassment, for it was illegal to buy and transport the animal because food was rationed. Usually my father slaughtered the animals assisted by my mother, and once I walked in on such a session and had some difficulty eating the animal afterwards. In addition, during the war years my father rented a small plot of land from a local farmer, which he made into a vegetable garden and in which the large enough children (including myself) also were put to work.

Meanwhile, while we were in Amsterdam, the situation became steadily worse. One day several men belonging to an official group especially formed to rob the Jews, came to our apartment and took all the valuables they could lay their hands on, including my violin, and that was the end of my violin playing for the next five years.

One day in July 1942 a notification arrived in the mail that at a particular day and hour my sister had to report at the Jewish Theater in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, with some clothing and food. She was to be transported to a labor camp, presumably, with many other Jews. At that time we did not know what we know now, but we had heard about concentration camps, and my father did not trust the Germans. Above all, he did not want the family to be broken up. As, a result of his business he had many acquaintances among farmers,

and therefore it was easier for him to find a hiding place in the country, where we figured it would be easier to hide than in the city. The only way to escape the clutches of the Germans was to leave the country or to go into hiding. As the former was very difficult as the Germans occupied most of Western Europe, only the latter possibility practically remained.

Every person was supposed to have an identity card with his picture to be carried by him all the time, and all registered Jews had a large "J" on it. As a Jew, even carrying false identity papers, one simply had to avoid contact with the police, because once their suspicion had been raised, it was not difficult to be discovered as a Jew, especially for males. A few people in "hiding" walked around free, but the possibility of discovery by a Nazi acquaintance was always there, so that the large majority was truly hidden. Only a small proportion of Dutch Jews went into hiding, the estimates are some 20,000, out of whom some 50% were ultimately arrested. The total number of Jews in Holland in May 1940 being 140,000. Yes, the decision to go into hiding must have been a difficult one, most people are more comfortable to passively let things take their natural (or unnatural course in this case!), rather than actively trying to improve their odds. Of course, it was also a question of finances, one simply had to have the funds to live off one's assets for an unknown period of time. I owe my parents a great debt of gratitude that they did have the courage to go in hiding, giving (some of) us at least a chance to survive. And so in early August 1942 we left Amsterdam and went into hiding in a small farm in the village of Groet, some 7 miles west of Alkmaar, close to the coast. The farm was situated some distance from the main road, surrounded by fields. The farmer and his wife were a very nice childless couple, and I think my father knew them from before. Another young Jewish couple from Amsterdam was already there. It was apparently through them that we got to know Mr. Jan Bregman, who was engaged in helping Jews in hiding and who in subsequent years did a great deal to help our family, providing us with new addresses to hide, when we had to leave the old ones, often for reasons of security. Soon my sister Altje left us and was brought to a farm a few miles away, until my parents unfortunately were ar-

rested in spring 1944. Because she was close by, she came to visit us now and then. That farmer's wife was a sister of Mr. Bregman.

Being in hiding meant that (at least ideally!) nobody should know that you were there. It meant that you could not go out during daylight hours, and you had to be out of sight and hearing when other people came by. Therefore it was convenient to be on a farm out in the fields and away from the bigger roads, so that you could see people coming. Another advantage of being around farms was that food was easier to come by, and this became more important towards the end of the German occupation, when there was famine in the big cities. Food rationing cards and false identity papers had to be obtained illegally and in these matters assistance from people like Mr. Bregman was indispensable. The moral courage of these "illegal workers" who helped Jews survive is unbelievable. When discovered by the police the fate of these people was often worse than that of the Jews: Concentration camps and almost certain death. And then to realize that they did all this without any monetary gain. The reasons why they did this work has recently been discussed in the literature. I certainly owe my life to them and besides that, they represent the very best in humanity. They came from all walks of life, intellectuals as well as simple laborers, communists as well as liberals, and all religions represented. Yes, there were even Jews among them! And it is interesting to speculate that it often takes circumstances of extreme stress to bring out in the human not only the very very worst, but also the very best!

Because we were out in the fields, we could at least go out in the dark and walk around the farm. We had two neighbors, one an elderly widower who came around quite often, but always announced himself quite loudly, so that I think he suspected our presence but did not want to talk about it. Our second neighbor was a then very famous Dutch writer and his family. His name was Jan de Hartog. Some 20 years ago I discovered that he was living in Bucks County, and arranged to meet him at a lunch at a colleagues house. He was a superb "causeur" and that lunch lasted five hours! He managed to flee to England during the occupation years, and told us many stories about

his meetings with the Dutch queen, who had fled to England before Holland capitulated.

Life in hiding was not easy. Besides the anxiety of being discovered, to which you more or less became accustomed, there was the monotony of always staying at the same place, and with the same people. Compatibility of personalities, self-restraint and diplomacy were all in great demand! And how does one spend his time? You helped with the household chores, read a lot and listened to the radio to hear the latest news about the war. (TV only appeared in the fifties). Because the Dutch news was slanted by the Germans, we listened to the broadcast from London which was forbidden, but this was something that could not be enforced! Being unable to go to school, I tried to get hold of as many books as possible, and studied as much as I could, but there is a limit on how much you can do on your own.

Fortunately we had reliable people who helped us. Besides the a fore mentioned illegal workers and of course our hosts, the former head of my father's workshop, Mr. Cornelis Wuurman as well our accountant Mr. Ort provided us regularly with money.

Early on my brother Max moved to Amsterdam and was taken in by a couple without children, the family Berlyn, where he had an excellent home. At the time of this writing Mrs. Berlyn is still alive and Max has visited her regularly.

After we had settled in our routine, things went fairly uneventfully. After about six months we left the farm, I do not remember the reason. My parents went to an address in Amsterdam-North, and I was taken into the family of Mr. Bregman, who lived in the same area. I had a very pleasant stay there, in so far as one can use that word in those circumstances. There was a son, John, my age and a few years younger daughter, Henrietta. As we were of similar age scholastically, this made studying easier for me. In the evening Mr. Bregman often took me for a walk and then I saw my parents at times.

During the summer of 1943 I had a lucky break. I was sent to a place in the country with lakes where I could go out freely, did swimming, boating, for a few weeks. I stayed with a young couple without children, in a barn, and this was heaven compared to my previous status as a "prisoner." A few years ago I received (here in Levittown) a letter from the lady with whom I then stayed. She obtained my address through my second cousin Elias Vlessing in Amsterdam. This although she was a sister of the lady with whom my brother stayed, and could have obtained my address from her, but that did not happen because the sisters are not on speaking terms. After my "lucky break" I returned to the very first hiding place, the farm in Groet, again with my parents as well as a young Jewish couple. This was late summer 1943, the war was going in our advantage although the Germans were far from defeated. Fortunately we had not encountered major problems such as illness requiring hospitalization, for instance, because that could endanger our security.

Things went well until one afternoon in about February 1944. Two policeman came to visit our farm for some reason apparently unrelated to us. While the farmers wife was talking to them in the kitchen, my father, who was hard of hearing, walked in and looked obviously startled. Apparently the policeman were neither entirely "good," meaning anti-Nazi, nor entirely "bad", meaning Nazi. Without doing any searching of the house or further questioning my father, or asking any further questions for that matter, they told the farmer's wife that "these people had to be out of there within the hour". And we were! Fortunately we had addresses of several people we could turn to in those circumstances. My father and mother took the farmer's and his wife's bikes and left for the farm where my sister was staying. I still see their silhouettes marked against the Dutch western mid-afternoon winter sky, riding their bikes, and that was the last time I saw them.

I was brought to the house of a middle aged couple whom had helped us before, belonging to Mr. Bregman's group of illegal workers. They housed another "illegal" person, a young man who was a deserter from the German army. On that stood the death penalty! He was

Dutch educated but probably of German descent. I stayed there for about one week until one afternoon the front door was opened and in walks our previous family physician from Alkmaar, Dr. Hogeboom. I had been friends with his son for many years and my sister was close friends with his daughter. I was just studying a well-known French classic in school edition (Alphonse Daudet: *Tartarin de Tarascon*) on which he duly remarked. Incidentally, this general practitioner at some time left general practice and went on specializing in ... you guessed it ... cardiology a fact possibly not entirely unrelated to my own subsequent career! He then brought me in his car to an authentic Dutch windmill not far from there. In this windmill at that time there were four other Jewish people in hiding. It was situated quite isolated at a canal amid meadows and farmed fields in the area North of Alkmaar called Heerhugowaard (you try to pronounce that one correctly!). This was a still operating windmill, although not very often. The miller was a rather weak and somewhat sickly personality, but that was more than compensated for by his wife.

My fellow Jews-in-hiding were an interesting group. The first one was a man in his fifties, an affluent manufacturer of margarine, a bachelor. He was not very pleasant, quite egocentric, but very well educated and a great lover of music. He had frequented the Concertgebouw orchestra concerts in Amsterdam for many years, and I avidly listened to his stories about the great conductors and musicians, because of my developing interest in music. The second person was a dentist from the Hague who was married to a physician, who had been arrested some time ago. She had two children who were in hiding elsewhere. She was a very fine person, very well educated who had a great interest in the arts. She became a kind of role model for me. Her name was Julie Kalker-Prins and we shall meet her again later on. The third person was a middle-aged woman of simple background. Fortunately we all got along with each other quite well. Because we were in a rather isolated location, we were able to go outside at night. I should also mention that initially there was also a fourth person, a terminal cancer patient, who was seen by a general practitioner. He passed away after a few months and was buried in the yard, accompanied by thunder and lightning.

While there, on June 6, 1944 the allied forces invaded the European continent near Dieppe, close to the English Channel, in France. This greatly boosted our morale and hope for a speedy end to our misery, however, that was to take another nine months!

The food in the windmill was plentiful. I do not know who paid for me there or in my next (and last) location, as I had lost contact with my parents. Most probably this money came from the underground organization, certainly nobody ever talked to me about money. I want to mention that after 1945 for years I made payments to an organization which provided financial assistance to ex-illegal workers and their families in need.

As I mentioned before, my father was able to obtain (his own) money to pay for our board and lodging at least part of the time through his former factory manager Mr. Cornelis Wuurman, until the time of his arrest, but I really do not know how much of that time, especially during his stay in Amsterdam, because contacts with the outside world were minimized for security reasons. While at the windmill I heard about my parents' arrest but without any details and for security reasons I did not further look into the matter.

Meanwhile the Allied armed forces were making good progress northwards. On Tuesday September 5, now known in the Dutch history books as "Mad Tuesday", the Allied forces made a spectacular breakthrough, but unfortunately were beaten back at Arnhem in the central Netherlands.

Two days earlier, after we all had gone to bed encouraged by the good news, around eleven o'clock there was a sudden bang on the front door. I heard our new boarder, who had arrived just a few days ago, call "Mother de Boer, The Police!" I immediately jumped out of bed and first was petrified. But then I quickly put on my undershirt and pants, and regained my capacity to think. I heard the policeman walk around downstairs (I slept on the first floor), and slipped up the long staircase that runs through the entire length of the mill, to a

hiding place just under the roof of the mill, which the miller had shown me shortly after my arrival in the mill. After a while men came up the steps with flashlights, and started to look around. They walked just below me but did not bother to go up a few more steps. I held my breath! They soon went downstairs again and did not return. Later I was told that they were afraid because outside there were strong winds and rainstorms. I then realized that I had to get out of that windmill as soon as possible because I had to assume that they knew about my presence and would be back for me! Though I did not hear anything more from downstairs I thought it would be too risky just to walk down the steps.

One way of getting down outside the mill was by way of the “vang”. This is a long beam which sticks out from the back side of the cap, to the end of which a rope is attached that runs to the ground. This in effect is the mill’s brake and when you pull that rope the mill starts to turn, which probably would happen if I slid down that rope! It is obvious that I shelved that idea! Then I crept to the front side of the cap, where the wings are attached. To my delight I noticed that the wings were in the vertical-horizontal position, creating the possibility to walk down the lattice work of the vertical wing, to the ground. There was a small window, large enough for me to creep through, which brought me just above the center where the two pairs of wings are attached to each other. There I grabbed a steel cable, apparently the lightning conductor, and slid onto the lower vertical wing and walked along its lattice work to the ground. Fortunately no police was posted outside (they were afraid!) And then I started to run on my bare feet, literally as if my life depended on it! Actually by regulation it was forbidden to be outside at that time, but the bad weather helped me! I swam twice across the canal and ran through the fields, avoiding the roads. At first I wanted to get as far as possible from the mill. After a while I realized that by the time of daybreak I had to get to some type of shelter, the way I looked. And then realizing that I had nothing to lose I took the gamble of my life. I knew that during elections several years ago only 4% of Dutchmen voted for the Nazi party. I decided to throw myself at their mercy, figuring that if they were not going to take me in, the chances that they would denounce

me to the police were small. So by the time of daybreak I picked myself a small farm situated some distance from the main road and went into a small shed. After some time the door was opened and in walks a wiry middle aged man, obviously the farmer. I told him right away that I was a Jewish boy fleeing a place invaded by the police. "Gosh" he said after awhile, "why don't you come in for breakfast", and I was brought to the breakfast table, where the very motherly farmer's wife and several family members were seated. After breakfast mother said: "Go upstairs to the boys' beds, they are still warm!" I slept until late in the afternoon. That family kept me for the remaining nine months of the German occupation. They never asked me any questions. They were devout Catholics and, as typical for that area at that time, worked on several small plots of land growing vegetables, with all members of the family participating. There were three sons, Teeuwis (Matthew), Gerard and Nico, and two daughters, Truus (Gertrude) and Marie. In addition there was an in-living relative who was feeble-minded Oome Klaas. They were very good for me, again I was kept in hiding. After a few days their neighbor's son-in-law, Piet Baars whom they suspected to have Nazi inclinations, stepped in and asked them about their new boy in hiding. They first tried to feign ignorance, but then he told them that he was bringing them ration cards for me, and that they could call on him in case a problem arose, in which case he could bring me to another hiding place in a nearby monastery (most people in the area were Catholics). Finally Klaas and Christina Smit (the farmer's couple) owned up to the fact that I was there, and they called me and I met Piet Baars. His in-laws, Jan and Mrs. Koenis were our neighbors. Piet helped us with ration cards and possibly with money for my stay. He ran a small trucking business in the nearby village of Nieuwe Niedorp. After the war I visited him and his wife, Emma, several times along with the Smith family and the Koenis family. Jan Koenis also was a vegetable farmer, his wife was the sweetest of all ladies. Sometimes I stayed with them, for instance when the Smit family had a family affair at their home and I had to disappear for awhile.

Out of the children of the Smit family, the oldest son, Teeuwis, about thirty years old, confined himself to the farm work. The second son

Gerard was a "wheeler-and-dealer" and besides doing his share of the farm's work, had a healthy spirit of enterprise and was engaged in all kind of deals involving vegetables, for which there was plenty of opportunity in view of the food scarcity in general, which was aggravated by the Germans seizing large quantities of food for their own army and people. Nico had some artistic inclinations, especially acting.

While there, during the fall months of 1944 I got the idea of visiting my sister, who was only about an hours bike ride away, with the specific plan to discuss with her hosts the feasibility of contacting an affluent business relation of my father in the area, who did a lot of business with the Germans, to see if he was willing and able to obtain the release of my parents. Of course, this was a risky business, he could have me arrested on the spot. I remember this man sitting in our living room singing a Dutch version of Hatikvah, accompanying himself on the piano. His name was Jan Kloosterboer. He lived in a big brick house called "Trappelend" (Trotting End) in Broek-Op-Langedyk. This means, when a farmer ploughs a field with a horse-drawn plough, the end of the field where the horse turns around every time and leaves a lot of hoof steps, and is therefore called the trotting end. This man, well known in the area, had earned his money exporting vegetables to Germany and to some extent was considered a traitor. So one evening, with the consent of my hosts, I borrowed one of their bikes and set out to visit the Lou De Boer family at Burgerbrug, where my sister stayed. I entered the house through the barn, and the farmers wife came to meet me. I shall never forget the look on her face when she recognized me: it was a mixture of astonishment, consternation, possibly remorse. The explanation of the latter feeling became only clear to me after I heard the whole story after the war was over. Mrs. De Boer then told me that my sister had been arrested during the spring months, as well as my parents. This I had not expected. She told me immediately that she did not want to know where I was staying. When I brought up the plan to engage Jan Kloosterboer she advised me against it. So I dropped the plan, in retrospect it would have been of no avail because almost certainly

my parents and sister were not alive any more at that time. According to the German records at Yad-we-Shem my mother and sister arrived at Auschwitz on May 21 and my father on May 22 and were executed in the gas chambers the next day.

So I returned on my bike to the Smith family at the Waarland. I had to pass through the German army barricade at Burgerbrug before 8 o'clock that night and arrived safely "home." The winter months of early 1945 were very grim. That time became known as the "Hunger Winter". There was famine in the bigger cities such as Amsterdam, which was some 35 miles away. I remember seeing the long lines of people pushing carts, on bicycles, trying to buy food from the farmers. Sometimes one of them could not continue the trip and was put on the cart. Ordinary citizens during those times could not afford cars, besides, the Germans would have confiscated them, and all the supplies of gasoline were strictly rationed or unavailable. Yes, there was much suffering also among the gentile population. The German army, before so invincible, became a sometimes pitiful sight. Instead of their large cars and trucks with which they entered the country in 1940, they now often had to make do with horse and wagon!

At the same time, the Allied armies made steady progress. When spring 1945 arrived Allied planes dropped food and other supplies in our area. And because the long awaited liberation seemed close at hand, I was allowed more freedom and joined the farmer and his sons in going to work in the fields. That was hard physical work, but nobody pushed me, I enjoyed being outside after having been kept indoors for so long and being in company with young people. I should mention that I had no further contact with any of my family, in this case my brother, until after the liberation. I did not pursue this because it was felt in the world of illegal workers and people in hiding that whenever people had been arrested, you could not be sure how much information the police had forced them to give out, and therefore not to resume contact was often the safest course, in order not to fall into a trap. This is best illustrated by the tragic history of my own family as it unfolded to me soon after the end of the German occupation.

And then, finally arrived the long awaited day of liberation! There was no great celebration or even rejoicing for me. I had lost too many of those dear to me, although I still had to find out what their ultimate fate had been, and, of course I had to find out about my brother Max. After a day or so I took a bike and started on my way to Alkmaar, less than an hour's ride away. On the way I met one of my old friends, Kees Hogeboom, the son of Dr. Hogeboom, who at the time had brought me to the windmill. He told me that Alkmaar indeed had been liberated and the the B.S. (a kind of impromptu civil guard) was marching around with stenguns. I never heard about stenguns, but I was soon going to find out! My goal was to go and see my Uncle Elize, the youngest brother of my father, who lived in Alkmaar and whose wife was a gentile, therefore he was exempted from the Nuremberg laws. I found him at home and of course told him my story, some of which he probably knew through our former factory manager Mr. Wuurman, who had visited us a few times while we were in Groet. He had had difficulties also as a Jew, and I think had even been in hiding for awhile. He invited me to come and live with his family for the time being. Meanwhile there was a festive atmosphere in town. The hated German soldiers were not in charge any more and instead small groups of a kind of people's militia had been formed by the provisional new Dutch government directed from London, England, who smartly paraded around in small formations in dark blue uniforms under much applause. So I moved to Alkmaar, thanking the Smit family in the Waarland for all they had done for me.

After the Liberation

Of course, my first order of business was to locate my brother. It must have been through Mr. Bregman in Amsterdam that I found out that he was alive and well in the little town of Lemmer in the province of Friesland. I also found out that my father's youngest sister Johanna, had survived the war in hiding, along with her husband Henry Vos and their son Jos, who was a few years my senior. My

father's brothers Salomon, Philippus, and his sisters Eva, Berendina and Rosette and their families had been deported and did not survive. On my mother's side my elderly grandmother and my mother's brothers Salomon and Hartogh as well as her sister Berendina did not survive. There was an office in Amsterdam where lists of names of Dutch Jews who had been found surviving in German and Polish concentration camps, were posted, besides being published in newspapers. On one of my trips to that office I ran into my mother's eldest sister Esther, who lived in the town of Den Helder some 25 miles North of Alkmaar. She was married to a German Jew by the name of Paul Steinberg, and they operated a drug store. They had a son and a daughter our age and I stayed with them at least once before the war. The entire family had survived the war in hiding. I recently received letters from their two children, one in Holland, one in Israel.

One day I took the boat to the Frisian city of Lemmer to take my brother back to our family. He had been taken care of very well by a family who were devout Calvinists. They had taken him to church every Sunday, and he had enjoyed a certain measure of freedom during his stay there. The former could be interpreted as suggesting that he would not be Jewish, but it should be mentioned that the intention was in certain cases to gain "souls" for the religion in question, and in the ensuing years pitched battles were fought between Jewish families and institutions one side and Christian religious institutions on the other to return these children to a Jewish environment.

Shortly after the liberation the family of Lou de Boer, the farmer who had taken in my sister Aaltje, at the time and where she had been arrested, invited me to stay with them for a short time, which I did. I should mention that the farmer's wife was a sister of Mr. Jan Bregman. After my return to Alkmaar I soon went to see Dr. Hogeboom, our former family physician who at the time had brought me from Groet to the windmill, and there Mrs. Hogeboom then told me some spectacular and almost unbelievable information, about the veracity of which I feel there is no doubt. A short time after we left the farm in Groet in early 1944, Mrs. de Boer came to see the doctor and demanded to know my whereabouts. She was threatened by the

police. when my sister was arrested, that they would take her about five year old son, who had contracted polio a few years before, if she did not come up with my address. How she knew that the doctor had brought me to the windmill until the present day is not clear to me. At any rate, the doctor feigned ignorance or out rightly refused to give the information and immediately thereafter went into hiding until the end of the German occupation (May 1945).

Now I started to understand the expression on the face of Mrs. de Boer when I went to see her in fall 1944 to discuss my plan to possibly obtain the release of my parents, but several questions now arise. Why did not I institute legal proceedings against her for trying to find me and denounce me to the Germans after I learned about all this, which could very well have resulted in my death, and why did not she call the police at that time and have me arrested? How to explain her behavior both before and after the liberation? These of course are questions related to the extremely complicated nature of the human character, further complicated by the extremely and unusually difficult choices that these abnormal times face us with, not encountered in more normal times. I felt that the mere fact that Mrs. de Boer took care of my sister the way she did during all that time, with all the risk this entailed, showed that she basically was a very good person. However, when she suddenly was faced with the threat to her young son, with whom they not long ago had gone through an agonizing period of polio, and she had to choose between him or me, her altruistic tendencies had to give in. That this happened only for a limited time period is attested to by the fact that when I came to her house a few months later, the first thing she told me was that she did not want me to tell her where I was staying. Neither did the Hogeboom family ever discuss with me the matter of prosecuting her. When we were in Holland the last time in 1990 with Barry and Sophie, I went to look for the farm but was unable to locate it with certainty. I have only limited information about my parents, since we left the farm in Groet for the last time, in early 1944. They again ended up in Amsterdam, and there unfortunately fell into the hands of the notorious Ans van Dyk, a Jewish woman once herself caught by the Germans and released on the promise that she would go out, find Jews in

hiding and hand them over to the police. She delivered some 155 Jews to the Germans. Fortunately she was arrested after the liberation, put on trial, sentenced to death and executed. I was present at the court session at which she was sentenced. In 1994 a book about her was published in Dutch by Koos Groen (it is in my library and called (in translation "When victims become perpetrators"). I want to translate the first paragraph of page 112:

"In April 1944 the duo Van Dyk-Simons would again strike in northern North-Holland. In Amsterdam Ans van Dyk had Barend Flessing and his wife go into hiding in her apartment in the Jekerstraat. She tried to get information out of them and learned that their daughter Aaltje was in hiding in the neighborhood of Den Helder. She had been there since August 1942 staying with the cattle keeper Laurens de Boer at Zype.

Apparently Ans van Dyk had told Flessing that she could arrange emigration to Portugal for them, because on April 4, 1944 Ans van Dyk and Branca Simons called at De Boer with a note from Aaltje's father, that Aalte would be picked up on May 9, to go to Portugal with a large group of Jews. But already on April 8 she was picked up by detectives of Jewish Affairs, who also took along De Boer and his wife. The parents of Aaltje Vlessing had already been arrested by Jewish Affairs. The Vlessing family did not survive the war".

My uncles Henry Vos and Elize Vlessing decided that each would take one of us into their families which certainly was laudable. I decided to let my brother go to our uncle Vos, so that I would stay in Alkmaar, and so it happened. My brother had a difficult time readjusting to his new situation, which is hardly surprising. There is no question that he was taken in with much love and patience. But three years of forcible separation from his parents and ultimately being orphaned, along with a measure of religious coercion, had taken their toll. Getting him to ultimately stop going to the Calvinist church each Sunday took a great deal of diplomacy and patience, as well as bringing him back to the Jewish fold.

I also was taken with much love into the family of my uncle Elize in my native town, which had a certain advantage. My uncle was business man like all the Vlessings, and a kind and mild-mannered man. My aunt was a gentile and consequently there was not much "jiddishkeit" in the home. There were three children, the oldest Marjanne, a few years my junior, with whom I established a strong bond of friendship lasting to the present day, as well as with her younger brother Eli, and then a younger sister Dientje (Berendina) who at the time was maybe eight years old, and with whom I have lost contact.

My parents' assets, personal and business, had come through the German occupation fairly well intact, thanks especially to the devoted help of our former factory manager, the above mentioned Mr. Wuurman (we visited him and his wife once on one of our visits to Alkmaar in the seventies), as well as to our former accountant, Mr. Ort. In addition many friends hid things for us, and we received everything back with one exception. I distinctly remember visiting a party in Amsterdam to claim some of our things, where one of our rugs was lying on the floor, which they denied being ours. I did not pursue this matter, understandably.

And then of course I restarted my high school studies at my old school, the Kingdom's Citizens High School. I just had completed third grade before we went into hiding. Therefore, after conferring with the school principal (who himself was married to a Jewish wife and also had experienced problems related to that) it was decided that I would repeat the last few months of the third grade. To my astonishment I found out that I knew more than many of my classmates, although I had not gone to school for almost three years! The explanation for that, as I later realized, was not that I was so smart or knew so much, but simply that the Dutch gentile population also had suffered terribly as I already mentioned before, from hunger, lack of many necessary things usually taken for granted, and along with all that, education had suffered greatly.

So I joined a class of youngsters three years my juniors. This, along with all my recent experiences gave me the feeling of being much older than my classmates. Nevertheless, I enjoyed again being among school mates and going to school parties. I even took a course in dancing! As before, we did not go to school in our own school building because it having been used and abused as an army barracks, but used another school building.

After a few weeks, at the end of the school year I was told that the teachers had decided to let me skip the fourth grade and I would continue in the fifth grade, by my choice in the more difficult science section. They gave me a hefty home work assignment for the summer vacation with the assurance that the teachers would be available for consultation in case of need. So I worked all through that vacation, which I did not mind at all, and the teachers were there to help me in the few problems that arose, mostly in math.

Meanwhile I did not hear anything official about the fate of my parents, sister and other relatives. It was not until about 1990 that I obtained at Yad-we-Shem in Jerusalem a long list of relatives who had perished in concentration camps, among them my parents and sister. This information came from German sources.

During my last year in high school I had to make a decision about my professional future. During normal circumstances I would most probably have joined my father in his business, as he was getting on in years (he would have been 57 years old by the end of the war) and would have been in need of some help as a solo-business man. I always was a good student and an avid learner at school, so some kind of academic career for me was quite plausible. I did not feel inclined to go into the business world or establishing a business of my own, and this had to do with my interest in Zionism and ultimately going on aliyah to what was at that time still Palestine governed by Great Britain under a mandate of the former League of Nations, which preceded the UN. After the war there was a great upsurge in Zionism, the horrendous losses of the Jewish people were taken by many, including myself, as a confirmation of Zionist theory, that only in a

Jewish state Jews would be protected from further similar experiences. With the enthusiasm of youth many of us were convinced this was the way to go, although many of the older people had their reservations about the practical realization of such a project. The first thing needed of course was a massive emigration to Palestine especially of young people. The Zionist organizations in the Netherlands were heavily involved in the training of young Jews through the hachsharah programs, especially in agriculture, because that was the occupation most needed in the country ... and least available among West-European Jews! And there was much pressure on the prospective olim not to enter into the traditional Jewish professions such as business, medicine, law, etc.

I myself felt inclined to enter the medical profession, interested as I was in the many different aspects both of medicine as a science and as a profession. I already sensed my own interest and also aptitude for many different disciplines, as well as some of the arts such as music. And I also was attracted by the great responsibility this profession entails.

However, when it came to aliyah as a physician, I was told by the representative of the hachsharah (who himself was finishing his studies as an agricultural engineer at the Dutch Agricultural Academy at Wageningen) that physicians were not needed among the Jews in Palestine (as the result of a large influx of German physicians and other intellectuals fleeing from the Nazis during the nineteen-thirties) ... you remember grandpa Wulf.

This problem weighed heavily on my mind for the next few years. I initially gave a great deal of thought to study another field, such as agriculture. At the beginning of my second year in medical school I even took the train to Wageningen, the locale of the Agricultural Academy, one day. But in the end I was afraid to enter a professional field that was not my primary interest as I would have to live with my work for a long time, and I accepted the consequences of this decision. So I continued in medicine. However, this decision, not unexpectedly, would have profound effect on the future course of

my life, namely that the difficulties Eva and I later had in Israel finding appropriate work in our specialties prompted us ultimately to return to the United States, to my great chagrin.

So I finished the fifth grade of high school and took the final exam. My grades were way ahead of my class mates. I had studied very hard that year, after almost three years of enforced idleness. Besides school there was not very much social life, as I mentioned above I took a class in ball room dancing, I did enjoy the occasional school dances organized by the social student organization VOKZOS, of which I was a member. At the end of the school year there was the traditional parade through town, of which I still have the pictures. And then, on to Amsterdam, where I had been accepted as a first year student at the Medical Faculty of the Municipal University, which had a good reputation.

As far as my financial ability to take up the study of medicine was concerned, taking some seven years, I don't remember ever discussing this openly with my uncle, but neither did I ever hear an objection. I assume that he knew the funds were available, although, as a result of the foot-dragging of the Dutch government in clarifying the financial situation of the surviving Jews, it was not until a dozen years after the liberation that our situation was settled.

So I moved to Amsterdam and lived in rented rooms. I greatly relished the cultural richness of this relatively small (at that time less than one million population) but very cosmopolitan city which had an unparalleled musical life. Although I could not afford the regular concerts of the famous Concertgebouw Orchestra, I mostly went to hear recitals. The many violin recitals I heard by the great violinist Simon Goldberg did much to form my taste for chamber music. Besides there were many other cultural manifestations, such as good theater, movies and art exhibits at the Ryksmuseum, and many others.

The first year in medical school was fairly hard as there were exams to take at the end of the year. I wanted to finish my studies within the

shortest possible time, which I did, notwithstanding the Israel interlude (to be discussed later). There were exams again after the third and fifth year. The second year therefore was rather relaxed, and during its first months, besides going to lectures and taking some minor exams, I read a lot of literature, especially poetry, in several languages. In March I had the opportunity to go to a ski camp in Lenzerheide, Switzerland, as a member of the Zionist student organization along with some fellow-students, one of them being Daan Kan, who was studying mathematics. There I met for the first time a sizable number of Israeli students, they of course spoke Hebrew among themselves. I had resumed the study of Hebrew, this time the modern version, the previous year at a course given by Dr. Josph Melkman (or Michman as he later changed his name in Israel), who later would become the first director of the Yad-we-Shem institute in Jerusalem. And during my second year in medical school I continued my Hebrew studies along with a group of Zionist students, with a Dutch-Israeli medical student. With all that, I had difficulty in keeping up in Hebrew, with those Israelis, in Lenzerheide! Fortunately there was a second year Israeli medical student who was willing to speak English with me. She could not go skiing because she had weak ankles, and so instead of skiing we went on long walks. Her name was Eva Wulf. She was born in Berlin. Her mother was a sabrah and her father was a chemical engineer, born in Lithuania, who had studied in Berlin. Her parents wisely had left Germany in 1933 and settled in Jerusalem. To me all this sounded very fascinating and exotic because so far I had only known Dutch Jews.. We decided to keep corresponding with each other.

Soon after my return to Amsterdam the political situation in the Middle East became very acute. On November 29, 1947 the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East had been decided on by the UN and the state was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. Immediately the surrounding Arab countries invaded the fledgling state. For me this was probably the most crucial period in Jewish history since the second exile. I saw the reestablishment of the state as the solution for the untenable situation of the Jews as a defenseless minority in many countries, with a record of persecution sometime in most. This then

was our chance, possibly the only one! This situation required every able-bodied Jewish man convinced of this idea to defend the new state, certainly those who had survived the Holocaust! Fortunately I had just completed the academic year. So I enlisted in the Haganah, the "official" military arm of the Jewish Agency of Palestine which became the Israeli army after the establishment of the state. I said good-bye to my relatives and friends and was sent to the port of Marseilles in Southern France.

I stayed there for maybe 10 days in a camp called Grand Arenas run by the Jewish Agency for Palestine. The camp's population were a strange mixture from many different countries, not confined to new inductees in the new Israeli army like myself, because there also were many women. So there was an Englishman who had fought as a pilot during WW2. Among my fellow Dutchman there were two physicians, one a prominent political person in Amsterdam. That not all of them were idealists like myself became clear to me when I met one of them several months later in Tel Aviv with an Army blanket under his arm, which he proudly told me he was going to sell! This man was from Amsterdam and the only gentile whom I met among the volunteers, obviously an unstable adventurer. The leaders of the camp were mostly Israelis. We boarded a rather small ship in Marseilles and most of us had to stay below deck as this was still illegal aliyah and the Mediterranean Sea was patrolled by English planes searching for our kind of ships. I did not feel like staying in the dark and dingy atmosphere below deck (after all this was basically a freight ship barely converted for the transportation of humans!). So on the first day I went on deck and managed to stay there for the remainder of the trip. The latter went uneventfully, the sea was calm, the weather was good (it was about June) and the food was tolerable. Arriving in Haifa was an emotional event, as it should be the first time for a good Zionist! After arrival I was sent to an army camp in Kfar Yonah, somewhat East of Beth Lid. The usual army training was started but I still had much free time. Therefore I requested to meet the camp physician who was very nice to me and offered me to assist him. He was a gynecologist in civilian life, but here he worked as a general practitioner. He assigned me to taking patients' histories. This was

an opportunity for me to practice my Hebrew! When I wanted to ask the first patient his age I said: "Kama ben adam atah". Fortunately somebody corrected me, not without hilarity! In addition, I was soon given a room in which I lived opposite the kitchen, where I would see people with minor complaints, and had to decide whom to send on to the doctor. This while I had completed only two years of medical school without almost any clinical training! And this in a country that was actually at war! At first I had much free time, I studied Hebrew as well as medicine, as on one of my visits to Tel Aviv I had bought a standard text in anatomy. I maintained good relations with the cooks in the kitchen, that at times had obvious advantages. This good life did not last very long as I was in due time sent to a course for platoon (medical) corps man, followed by a course for company medical corpsman. This after I had been sent to Tel Aviv one day for further assignment. I heard the officers in question discuss the different possibilities (Front A, Front B etc.) and my heart sank into my shoes I must admit! But then apparently it was decided to exploit my although still very incomplete medical background. The result was that I never saw battle, something I did not particularly regret!

After the first course I was sent to the large army camp Sarafand, in the central part of the country, which had been taken over from the British, for the second course. These courses were very useful to me. They of course were given in Hebrew, and strengthened my knowledge of the language in general. Besides, I learned Hebrew medical terminology, which came me in good stead later on when I worked as a physician.

And then I got to know the country, during my days of leave I mostly went to nearby Tel Aviv. During my previous visit to Switzerland one of the Israeli medical students had given me the address of his parents in Tel Aviv. Soon after my arrival I visited them. They were a physician's family, originally from Germany, I think, and they received me very cordially. I visited them many times during weekend leave and in this way I also learned more about the country in general. In addition, my recently acquired Israeli friend Eva Wulf had given me the address of her parents in Jerusalem (who would in due

time become my in-laws!). I also visited them several times and they received me very cordially. Once I hitched a ride to Jerusalem in a car with several Army officers. It was winter time and on our way in the Judean hills it started snowing. This happens in Israel quite infrequently. The Army officers in the car were originally immigrants from Central Europe, and they had not seen snow for years. They stopped the car, got out and started to romp about in the snow like young dogs! And after arriving in Jerusalem I remember seeing soldiers on rooftops throwing snowballs into the streets.

During the second course for medical corpsman I was sent to a small army hospital not far from Ramla for some practical experience. There I had some foretaste of my future work although this time mostly surgical, as many battle wounded soldiers were brought there. I also spent quite some time in the operating room, watching surgery. That was a fascinating spectacle! I never saw the chief surgeon, who had an excellent reputation. The surgery was done by Dr. Teichman, assisted by Dr. Kalter. Both were from Eastern Europe and during the surgery they carried on interminable discussions in a language I did not understand, probably Polish. It was said that the surgeon had only limited experience in the field, but he seemed quite self-confident. I guess that these situations are not unusual in war time, when the need for surgeons may exceed the supply. The anaesthetist was a middle aged lady from England, who kept a low profile. After I had finished the second course, the war had whittled down and an armistice with some of the enemy parties was in effect. I decided therefore to return to Holland to resume my studies. My request for a discharge from the army was granted, but there was one problem and that was my Dutch passport which had been taken from me when I entered the country. I could not count on much help from the Dutch embassy, as I was aware of the fact I could lose my Dutch citizenship by enlisting in foreign military service without prior consent of the "Crown". This was confirmed by a discussion I had with a Dutch consul (himself a Dutch Jew!) who assured me he had never seen me! Obviously the Dutch government had decided to look the other way in these cases. There was a special office in Tel Aviv where I could inquire if my passport had been found. Meanwhile a medical

school was being organized at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and I was given the opportunity to continue my studies there. Having little of a choice I signed up. So one bright morning in early March 1949 I left the army camp and took the bus to Jerusalem. I had decided though, to go first to Tel Aviv to see if my Dutch passport had turned up and indeed, it was there waiting for me! This confronted me with an important decision, namely to stay in Israel anyhow. If I had done that, it would most certainly have significantly changed the course of my life. My main reason for not staying was that I had some doubts about the quality of the education in Jerusalem and therefore I decided to return to Amsterdam.

On my discharge from the army I received some money, and from this I first bought myself some decent clothes. In addition, before I left I made a tour of the country, especially of the Galil. The Israeli government also paid my air trip back to Amsterdam, but with a stop-off in Geneva, Switzerland, where I went to visit my friend Eva Wulf in Lausanne for a few days. I returned to Amsterdam at the end of March, in the middle of the second semester of my third year in medical school, the last preclinical year. At the end of this semester there would be a series of exams, to be taken in June or September, which had to be passed before continuing with the fourth year.

During the following six months I studied harder than at any other time in my life. My professors were very understanding and exempted me from some of the lab work. I studied from morning into evening. The only diversion was that during late August or early September my friend Eva came to visit me from Switzerland and we made a short trip in Holland. I passed the exams in September, so that after all the Israeli interlude had not caused any delay in my medical studies. In addition I had learned much about the country, spoke Hebrew fairly well and had gone through many interesting experiences otherwise. And last but not least, I had come through a war as a soldier without injury!

The next few years were uneventful. I continued my studies according to plan. The Dutch government never asked me any questions about my stay in Israel. I continued my interest in music and heard

many concerts and recitals. At one time I considered taking up the violin again and taking lessons with one of the first violinists of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, but that was too expensive, so I dropped those plans, also because of other possible difficulties playing a musical instrument in rented rooms. I did play in a students' orchestra for a short while during my second year but that was the last of my violin days. It would be another 27 years before I resumed playing an instrument, but that would be the 'cello'!

In late 1952 Eva finished her studies in Lausanne. It had always been her wish to continue her studies in the U.S.A. for several reasons. First of all, the practical experience during the medical school years in Lausanne (as well as in Amsterdam! for me) had been inadequate. The U.S.A. at that time already was foremost in medicine, besides that, there was a lack of doctors in the hospitals there, so that it was relatively easy for foreign physicians to obtain a position in a hospital there, even in teaching hospitals. In addition, Eva had many relatives from both sides of the family in the States, especially in New York City. Besides, because she was born in Berlin, she could come to the States on the German immigration quota, which was relatively large and therefore waiting times for a visa were relatively short. For all these reasons she decided to continue her studies in the States. I myself was more inclined to go on aliyah after finishing my studies in Amsterdam, that would be in 1954. However, for most of the above reasons I also felt inclined to go to the States, although I had no relatives I knew of there and it took longer to get a visa as a Dutchman. I had spoken to colleagues who had taken training in States and were very satisfied, and in addition I knew some Americans who studied medicine in Amsterdam and could give me valuable information about hospitals etc. They were often Jewish, and the victims of numerus clausulus. So finally I also applied for an American visa and applied to several hospitals in N.Y. City. I decided to go after the first of my required two years of practical work in Amsterdam, leaving the second year to be completed later on, if at all.

Before leaving for the States to start her internship at the Jamaica Hospital in Queens, N.Y. City, Eva came to visit me in Amsterdam in

December 1952. I finished my first year of "coassistentschappen" (practical work) a few months later and had been accepted as a rotating intern at the Jewish Hospital of Brooklyn, a good hospital as I was assured by my American colleagues. So I left for the States at the end of June 1953 by boat, which was the usual means of transportation for this route, at that time. The trip took ten days and went uneventful, I do not remember being sea sick. Eva and Uncle Mendel were there to meet me at the dock in Brooklyn, and took me to Uncle Mendel's house in Long Branch N.J. Eva was quite satisfied with her work at Jamaica Hospital in Queens, NY, and I started my work at the hospital in Brooklyn. The first few months were very difficult. Although I had received a good theoretical background in Amsterdam, my American colleagues' training was more practically oriented, and as I was immediately thrown into the care of acutely sick patients, there was a lot I had to learn, but I caught up in a few months and enjoyed the responsibility I was given. On a personal level things were not so simple as we worked in different hospitals located quite some distance from each other, and I shared a room with a colleague. Fortunately Eva had a room for herself so, somehow we managed. And then of course the first order of business was getting married. That was not so simple, for neither of us had a penny and our salaries were puny, as we already received room and board. Besides, the stress and strain of my new job took all my attention and energy. However, Eva insisted and so on August 23 I went to to my own wedding as a complete stranger. There I was faced with dozens of people almost none of whom I had ever seen before. Those of course were Eva's relatives from both sides of the family, and in addition a Dutch physicians couple from my hospital as well as a number of foreign physicians from Eva's hospital. (just listen to the gramophone record of the wedding made by one of her relatives as our wedding present). Understandably there were none of my relatives. The wedding took place at the house of Eva's Uncle Morris Goodstone in Jamaica, Queens who had just moved into the house and doubled as a "consecration of the house". Who paid for the wedding besides her uncle is not clear to me, but we literally owe them a debt of thanks! The wedding was performed by the rabbi of Morris Goodstone's synagogue and was very beautiful. After the wedding we went on our

honeymoon to Niagara Falls, a traditional honeymoon spot in New York State.

And then we completed our year of rotating internship, meaning that time was spent in the most important specialties such as internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology. This was actually the last phase of training as a general practitioner, and required for taking the State Boards exams, although that was not our intention at that time. Eva, who finished half a year ahead of me, wanted to specialize in eye diseases and in order to start had to take a theoretical course, for which she had to pay. Therefore she first took a hospital job in Kew Gardens Hospital which paid very well as it was not a teaching hospital, and this way she earned the money for the nine months theoretical course at N.Y.U.

Meanwhile I wanted to specialize in internal medicine, and started my second year in the States with a residency at the Queens General Hospital. This was a "city hospital", meaning that it had to accept all patients requiring admission who had no private insurance, these were often poor and very sick patients. This was good training for the "house staff" provided you knew what you were doing. It was a very busy year and my previous year at the Jewish Hospital, where I had a lot of supervision and excellent teaching, came in good stead. This time there was not much supervision, except by the senior house staff. Sometimes one of my attending staff "teachers" pulled an electrocardiogram (of one of his private patients) from his pocket and asked me what I thought of it!

While we worked in Queens we hired an apartment for the first time in our married life, and later moved to Manhattan. Subsequently we both moved to the Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, where Eva started her residency in eye diseases and I worked in pulmonary diseases for a year. There we were given a room in the nurses' residence and I was the only man living there! Those years of medical specialization were rather uneventful. It was hard but interesting work and much studying on the side, and there was not much time (and money) for anything else. The training we both received was excellent, as was

the quality of the teaching staff (in general) and the many opportunities for hearing lectures in other hospitals etc. And then we went to shows now and then and took vacation trips. We often saw Mom's rather many relatives who were very hospitable and we spent many happy hours with them. In 1955 we bought our first car, a second hand Chevy which turned out to be in excellent condition and served us well until we left the country in 1958. I used it at first to travel from Manhattan, where we lived in the garment district around 30th street, when Mom took her course at N.Y.U. , to the hospital in Queens. That, by the way, was the first time I drove a car and an appropriate "fire baptism", for when you can drive in Manhattan you can drive anywhere! We took our first longer car trip in 1955 when we traveled to Florida with an Indian couple.

My third year here I took a residency in pulmonary diseases at the Montefiore Hospital, where, as I mentioned before, Mom already had started her specialization in eye diseases. Besides the training being excellent, this was a Jewish hospital where most of the teaching staff and even many of the patients were Jewish, and we felt very comfortable there. Besides I liked the democratic atmosphere in American hospitals, especially among the teaching and the house staff. This was very conducive to the learning process, because you were judged by your actions and statements no matter where your place in the hierarchy, and anybody had to be able to justify his actions or opinions before anybody else. During that year I worked for a few months in the sanatorium for pulmonary tuberculosis patients in Bedford Hills, affiliated with our department. That was a very valuable experience as it exposed me, besides to the treatment of their physical disease, which had made tremendous progress within relatively few years as a result of the development of potent drugs as well as thoracic surgery, to the patient with chronic disease, who often developed severe psychological problems as a result of this chronic condition, which requires much understanding and patience on the part of the treating personnel, an experience often lacking in many teaching programs. The next year, my third year residency, I spent at the Bronx Municipal Hospital in N.Y. City, again a "city" hospital, which was the teaching hospital of the newly established

Albert Einstein College of Medicine, which belonged to the Yeshivah University. Although I was attracted by its reputation and it being a Jewish institution, my program was disappointing in that it was lacking in providing practical experience although very good in academic content.

As cardiology had been my principal interest since my second year in medical school, but in this country at least at that time could not be practiced as an isolated (sub) specialty, but had to be practiced in the wider context of the field of internal medicine, I had completed a program that would qualify me for board certification in the latter field. But at this point I wanted to continue my training in cardiology. To this effect I took a position on the cardiac catheterization team at the Montefior Hospital Bronx, N.Y. This was a fairly new sophisticated procedure to determine if certain cardiac patients, adults as well as children, were candidates for surgical correction of their problem. The hospital had an excellent cardiac surgery program and a long list of children with congenital heart disease waiting for possible surgical correction by any of the methods that recently had been and were being developed. This was a very interesting year. My chief was a lady (and quite a lady she was!), Dr. Doris Escher, who was very capable, and it was a pleasure to be back at "Montefiore" with its democratic atmosphere. The chief of cardiology, Dr. J.B. Schwedel was an exceptional individual, a rare combination of brilliance, knowledge and a magnificent personality. My dealings with "Doris" were somewhat stormy at times due to differences in our approach to certain problems, but we always remained good friends. Meanwhile Mom had finished her training and through the hospital had obtained a job in her field near the hospital which enabled her to save some money. This came in very handy when we had decided to go back to Israel in September 1958, and enabled us to buy some furniture and other things which we took with us. At that time we already had secured jobs in Israel, Mom at the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and myself at the Government Hospital at Tel Hashomer. Unfortunately we were unable to find work in the same location.

On our return to Israel we moved in with my in-laws. They lived in a

beautiful house in Beth Hakerem, the first residential area built under the British Mandate in the New city. They were single houses, quite spacious, with a sizable garden around them, built of the beautiful Jerusalem stone. My in-laws had bought the house with the reparation payments from the German government, to which they were entitled as refugees from Germany. At that time my sister-in-law Rachel and her family were living in the basement, so that we all lived together, which was quite cozy. I should not neglect to mention that our first child, Ruth, was born at the Mount Sinai Hospital, only a few months before our departure.

As the distance from the Tel Hashomer Hospital was too great to travel on a daily basis, I stayed at the hospital and drove home for the weekends, soon in my own car that I had bought in Tel Aviv, a small English station wagon. Mom lived with her parents.

Unfortunately both Mom and myself lost our jobs after some nine months. Because we were not very happy working in different locations, and the difficulty in finding work, mainly because of the excess of physicians in the country, certainly for both of us in the same location, we decided to (ultimately) go back to the States and settle there. The problem was that we could not return to the States within at least two years after our departure because of the visa regulations. Because I had not finished my medical training in the Netherlands, we decided to return there for me to finish and obtain my Dutch degree, in order to avoid possible difficulties later on in the States getting my license.

So we returned to Amsterdam in September 1959 where we moved in with a childless couple ("Tante Kersten") in the Roerstraat. I took my required stints of practical work in obstetrics, surgery and ent, somewhat silly and redundant after my USA experience, and received my Dutch medical license. I lined up a fellowship in congenital heart disease with the famous Dr. Helen Taussig at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore for after our return to the States. Mom and Ruth's visa for return to the States arrived in June 1960, three months before mine. That was because Ruth was an American citizen, and

Mom received her visa from the German quota (being born in Berlin), which was much larger than the Dutch quota. During those months Mom and Ruth lived with Uncle Mendel and Aunt Rolina in New Jersey and I moved in with my Aunt Jo in Amsterdam (the mother of Uncle Jos Vos).

After my return to the States we went to Baltimore and I started to work at Hopkins. Although it was quite an experience to work in one of the truly great medical institutions in the world, with physicians who were legends in their own time, the training program was deficient in several respects, especially in the area of obtaining practical experience, in that it was inadequate as a preparation for independent work in this field. Nevertheless, it was a worthwhile experience and helped me a great deal in my practice later on. During that time I also prepared for the State Board exams, which required reviewing most of the material taken in medical school, a time consuming proposition. These exams had to be passed in order to obtain a state medical license, each state having its own exams and, at least for foreign candidates, there being very little reciprocity between states in recognizing each others exams. I decided to take the exams in N.Y. and Pennsylvania. Both were big states with large populations and opportunities for practice. Although the exams were difficult in N.Y. (50% failure rate), they were easy in PA (2% failure rate). In addition, Mom had already passed a portion of the N.Y. exams, and we knew New York City. I collected some information about the number of physicians in Pennsylvania and New York in our specialties especially in the suburban area of Philadelphia, because we were especially interested in suburbia, being close to all the cultural features of the big city and at the same time avoiding its unfavorable physician to population ratio.

One day I went to look over the Levittown area and not knowing anybody there, I did what a good Jew does in those circumstances: I went to a synagogue. This happened to be Beth El and the first one I bumped into there was Mr. Krakauer, the principal of the synagogue school. When I asked him the name of a colleague he gave me the name of Dr. Mortimer Nelson, a local obstetrician (who later was to

deliver Naomi and Barry). I met him at the Lower Bucks Hospital, and obtained some useful information from him about practice opportunities in the area. He also advised me to see the chief of the internal medical service, Dr. F. Erlichman. This gentleman, who later was going to be my chief at the hospital, was very kind, though non-committal. "Eli:, he said, "You are welcome, I shall not do anything for or against you". I considered this a favorable remark, and also because my research had shown me an advantageous physician-to-population ratio in the area, we decided to try our luck here. In retrospect I must say that I never regretted this decision, quite the contrary! Although it took me some 2 years to "break even" (fortunately we had some money to tide us over that period in my burgeoning practice), its subsequent development, as well as the very central location of the area, close to Philadelphia with its many academic medical institutions, its rich cultural life especially in the area of music, the proximity to New York City, to the sea and the mountains, testify to the correctness of that decision, I think.

The next step was buying a house, or rather two houses, as there were practically no office buildings in the area. Besides, I found that almost all my colleagues in the area were using Levittown houses as offices. An additional advantage of that was the relative inexpensiveness of these houses. So I bought two houses, a Levittowner to be used as an office (in Stoneybrook), and a Country Clubber (our present house) to live in, after Mom and myself had driven up from Baltimore a few times to look.

Let me mention that Levitt and his sons had built Levittown PA between about 1954 and 1958, when they built 17,000 houses in this area, mostly in three different sizes, the smallest being the Levittowner and the largest being the Country Clubber. There was only one problem with using these as professional buildings, and that was that Levitt had stipulated that they only could be used as such when you also lived there. Apparently this restriction was widely ignored at the time because many Levittowners were used as professional offices, as mentioned above. So we went ahead with above purchases. As luck would have it, the house we intended to use as an office building happened

to be opposite that of a former co-worker of Levitt, who, when he found out that we intended to use it exclusively as an office, threatened to sue us in Quarter Sessions Court. So we had hardly set foot in Levittown and we already were in a lawyer's office, to clarify the situation. He indeed advised us to back out of the purchase, but also told us that in Tullytown Township such restrictions were not in effect. Fortunately we had an excellent real estate sales woman and there was a clause in the contract under which we could back out of the deal. This did not deter our very diligent real-estate lady who went knocking doors in the Lakeside section in Tullytown Township and found us our present office building. We paid some \$3000 - in excess of its price as a home, but if I consider how much we saved as compared to having rented or even purchased a professional office building, this was one of the best investments we ever made!

Next I went to North Philadelphia to a surgical supply store and bought the equipment I needed for the office. I did already have an electrocardiograph, which I had bought here before we went to Israel in 1958.

I should mention that we had decided that Mom would not start a practice for the time being as she was sufficiently occupied with the care of two small children and she did not want the children's care to suffer as a result of her practice (children!! did you read this?!!!) After all those preparations we drove to Levittown, I think it was on December 17, 1961. There was snow on the ground. We first drove to the house, the essential furniture was waiting for us inside. Then we drove to the realtor's office to make settlement on our two buildings, and ... as the saying goes ... THE REST IS HISTORY!

